

Agenda Item Number 9.a.

Intergovernmental Funding Assistance

Presenter: Byron Vanderpool

Action Recommended: Information Only

Discussion:

Last year, LCOG brought in more than \$20.4M in grants for agencies in Lane County.

LCOG has a lot of experience with grants and granting agencies, and thought we'd share a few well earned tips for success. These tricks also hold true for other opportunities like the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act.

Be Prepared! Planning and prioritization pay off. Grants rarely allow you more than a few weeks to decide what you want, bring partners together, and get the grant in. Having a list of ideas and agreed upon projects is great – a strategic plan with short and long term needs and priorities even better.

Remember the Golden Rule! *Them that has the gold, makes the rules.* We're often asked to "write me a grant to do this project." It doesn't always work that way – granting agencies put out grants to do certain things, and ***your project has to match the grant. Not the reverse.*** If the grant is to retrain left-handed elephant handlers, they don't care that you have lots of right-handed ones in your town. It pays to have several projects in mind, look at lots of grants, and only apply for those that match. Note that on-going operations are almost never grant-eligible.

It Takes Money to Make Money! Grant writing is expensive – they always take longer to write and assemble than you think. Then there's the match – almost all grants require a match of some sort – and cash speaks louder than in-kind, even if the granting agency will accept the latter. There's also the on-going operations and maintenance of the program. Make sure you do a full life cycle analysis to ensure you can afford this "free" money. But that said, remember grants just written by LCOG brought in an additional \$20M Lane County agencies wouldn't otherwise have.

Read the Freaking Manual! If there's one mistake made more often than any other, it's the failure to follow instructions. We once had a grant deemed "non-responsive" because the margins were 1-1/8" wide, not 1-1/4". The granting agency wants you to be successful, so they put out grant guidance, and often hold workshops. Make sure you read the guidance carefully, and attend the workshops. They'll usually tell you what they want in a narrative or a budget. Make sure you hit every point they list. They often have a grant contact you can call – do so.

Once you're all done and everything's ready – go over it again. Grant guidance often includes a check list. If it doesn't, make your own.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words! This can be in the form of drawings, maps and actual photos, but drawing a picture in the mind of the reviewer is important too. Tell a compelling story and put it in terms your reader can grasp. Reviewers in Washington D.C. don't know where Lane County is, or anything about it, but tell them “*Lane County is the size of the State of Connecticut, with a geography like the European Alps*” and they can get the picture. Don't rely solely on emotion, but do paint a clear picture of your need: “*Lane County's unemployment rate exceeds 12%, and 37% of school children receive a free or reduced cost lunch.*” Don't waste time on national statistics except as they compare to local conditions. That *All Politics Are Local* is true in grants too.

It Takes a Village! Generally, group or regional requests will be stronger than individual asks. Granting agencies like to see agencies working together. They get a bigger bang for the buck that way. And grants are best written by teams. Your grant writer likely knows about grants, but probably doesn't know about your business or your project. You'll need to supply the partnerships, technical details, budget, letters of support, and so forth. Make sure you're ready to support the grant writer. Make sure all team members know their individual grant preparation tasks and when each task is due. Someone should have the role of editing the narrative and putting the full grant application package together. Remember, you want it to read like one person wrote it—one voice.

Don't Make Promises You Can't Keep! Something to keep in mind – for granting agencies to be successful, they have to spend money. We get so used to being successful if we save money; we forget that's failure for grantors. So make sure you can do what you say you will do – you need to complete the project within the grant's deadlines, spend the money on what you said you would, and never, ever give back grant money. Your plans may very well change in the months between grant conception and project performance. That's usually OK, but make sure you get authorization to change the grant, *before* you change the project. And if you apply for a grant and months later discover you have to turn it down, recognize the risk, you may be giving up future opportunities with that agency.

Success Breeds Success! Remembering grant agencies are only successful when they spend money on authorized activities, so they like betting on a sure thing. When you're well prepared, have a track record of carrying through on your promises, and have successfully worked with a variety of agencies, you're more likely to get your grant. It's helpful to build a personal relationship with the grant administrators; if they know you, they're more likely to help you, or find that loop hole when you get stuck.

It's Not Over Until the Paperwork's Complete! So you got that grant – congratulations! Now the work begins. Every grant has a reporting process, make sure you're prepared for it. File the forms on time, answer their questions, do the press releases. And make sure you close out the grant appropriately, including the project evaluation. Give the granting agency at least one good anecdote they can take back to their funding source. Thank them for making the world a better place. After all, you want the grantors to feel kindly toward you the next time, don't you?